



DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS
Bureau of Water and Wastewater
Utility Billing Division



Martin O'Malley Mayor

George L. Winfield, Director

FAST FACTS

- **The Utility Billing's customer service telephone number is 410-396-5398**

Please advise all water customers to contact the Utility Billing Customer Service Section as soon as a problem or question is identified. Approximately 90% of all issues can be resolved easily if reported in a timely manner.

- **When a caller reports an unusually high water bill.**

High water bills can be caused by many different reasons. These can range from water leaks, excessive usage, stolen water, estimated bills or incorrect meter readings. The problem should be reported to Customer Service immediately so an inspection can be scheduled and the meter reading verified if necessary. In water leak situations, the City will repair all leaks on City property, up to and including the meter. For leaks on the customer side of the meter, the customer is responsible for any repairs. When water leaks are the cause of the high bills, Utility Billing can adjust only the highest affected quarter, for both water and sewer charges, when documentation of the repairs is submitted.

Estimated bills will usually resolve themselves when the next actual reading takes place. If an account was overestimated, and an adjustment is necessary, this will take place without a request from the customer.

- **What exactly is the City responsible for when it comes to water service?**

The City is responsible for the water mains delivering water to each neighborhood up to and including the water meter and vault. The part of the water service from the meter to the property, and inside the property, is the responsibility of the property owner. Inspections performed for high water bills consist of verifying that the water meter and the water line into the meter are not leaking. The reading on the meter is verified for accuracy against the last reading taken. One simple test often performed by inspection staff is to determine if the water meter continues to register water usage after verifying that no water is being actively used in the property. This test will indicate the probability that a water leak exists on the part of the water service for which the customer is responsible.

- **Why didn't the water inspector check the inside of my property?**

Utility Billing policy is routinely not to enter the private property of our customers. The primary reason for this policy is that the City is only responsible for the water service up to and including the water meter itself. If a leak is probable on the customer's property based on our inspection and testing, the property owner is responsible for inspecting the possible sources of that leak.

Both the customer service staff and the field inspection staff routinely offer suggestions as to how these "internal" inspections can be conducted. In order to rule out a possible underground leak, the property owner may need to retain a qualified professional to make that examination. If done in a timely manner, the cost of this professional inspection and any subsequent repairs can be submitted for consideration for the one-quarter leak adjustment.

FAST FACTS

- **Why do I need to request a Water Bill Hearing?**

If a customer does not report a potential problem in a timely manner, such as a leak that has been allowed to continue for two or three quarters, a water bill hearing would be required to request any adjustment beyond one quarter. The hearing officer will listen to the reasons for the excessive bills and request an explanation for the delay in reporting the problem. The customer will be required to submit documentation of any professional inspections or repairs. Based on this information, the hearing officer has the option of reducing charges for multiple quarters, as well as financial penalties charged to the customer's account.

A water bill hearing is also required in situations where any customer is not satisfied with the adjustment decision or level of adjustment, processed by Utility Billing. The decision of the City's hearing officer is the final step in the City's appeal process. The customer has the right to appeal the decision in Circuit Court. No legal representation is required for city water bill hearings.

- **My property is vacant and abandoned, why do I still get a quarterly bill?**

Even though a property is vacant or abandoned, the property owner is still responsible for minimum quarterly charges associated with the maintenance of the water service. Not until the water meter is removed and the service is completely disconnected will the quarterly charges be discontinued. There is a fee associated with this disconnection.

- **My property is vacant and others in the neighborhood have been stealing my water through the outside hose connections. Why do I have to pay for this?**

The property owner is responsible for the cost of any water that passes through the water meter, regardless of who is responsible for the usage.

It is the responsibility of the property owner to secure and monitor any water usage in the same manner as he/she is responsible for monitoring electrical usage for the property. If water is being taken from the property illegally, the owner may report the crime to the police, or take civil action against those responsible to recoup any financial loss.

- **I received a water bill/delinquent notice/turnoff notice that I cannot pay. What should I do?**

The customer needs to contact the Collections Division immediately at 410-396-3988 in order to make payment arrangements, if possible. This will reduce the chances of having their water service turned off for delinquency.

- **Why did I get this delinquent notice/turn off notice in the mail?**

Delinquent notices are mailed to customers when any outstanding balance remains unpaid for more than two quarters (6 months). A 5% penalty is accrued quarterly for any delinquent balance. When a delinquent balance reaches \$500, the customer is mailed a turnoff notice indicating that the account is subject to turnoff for nonpayment.

Situations that do not permit delinquency turnoffs are bankruptcy, health or medical situations, accounts with payment arrangements in place, tenant occupied properties, properties with inside water meters, accounts that have requested water bill hearings, and other miscellaneous situations that may be identified.

- **My water was turned off for nonpayment, and I have now paid the outstanding balance. When can I get my water turned back on?**

For accounts that have been turned off for delinquency, payments received or payment plans established before 3:00 pm will result in the water service being turned back on the same day.

For payments received or payment plans established after 3:00 pm, the account will be turned back on the following day except for emergency circumstances. Questions concerning delinquency or turnoff notices should be directed to the Collections Department at 410-396-3988.